



State of Connecticut
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SB 943: An Act Concerning Charter Schools Modernization and Reform

Representative Edwin Vargas

6th District

February 25, 2015

I want to thank Sen. Slossberg, Rep. Fleischmann, and the members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify regarding the Charter School Reform Bill, SB 942.

As a 35 year veteran within the Hartford Public School system as a teacher, I was a strong supporter of the Charter School Movement from its inception. As a parent and community activist, I was also a signatory for Hartford's first character school, as well as, the Sports & Medical Sciences Academy. It was the goal of parents and teachers that these original charter schools would serve as labs to experiment with new teaching methodologies. The methodologies and teachings that proved to be most successful would then serve as a model for every neighborhood public schools.

Unfortunately, the proliferation of charter schools has started to create a parallel system that is now competing for scarce resources with our neighborhood schools. We are writing checks without expecting any accountability. Charters have created a massive and publicly funded lobbying apparatus at our expense. It is time to slow down and take a good look at what we are getting for our dollars.

While SB 492 takes some timid steps in that direction, it is sorely insufficient. For openers, it should be amended to incorporate a three year moratorium on any new charter schools until our State Department of Education (SDE) can get a handle on the current status of existing character schools in the community. Other than their own grandiose self-assessments, I question what little has become independently public about these character schools. The best cases that evidence the



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active reform of charter schools are both the Jumokey Academy & FUSE scandals, as well as, the reports of record suspensions & expulsions by Achievement First.

The need for proper allocation of the 14.4 million new dollars slated for charter schools comes at a time when we are presented with a budget that hurts human services including our IDD population, college students, medicated recipients, and Connecticut citizens from all walks of life. In order to protect our vulnerable populations, we need a moratorium and we need stronger accountability language in this proposed bill.

I ask this committee to strengthen this bill by amending it before sending it to the House and Senate. Let us apply the saving where necessary, in an attempt to help populations like those that are a part of the community with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities. Connecticut has the worst educational gap in the nation. We will only close it when we address the needs of the poor, English limited, and the special needs students. It's these three populations that are over-represented in our neighborhood public schools. Charter school boosters will say that they are doing their share to close the gap. I am truly skeptical that this is actually happening. Let's us verify for ourselves by adopting a bill that inspires confidence rather than tip-toeing around these blatant issues. Please do not send us a bill to the floor that is a mere feel-good shell posing under the strong title of "Modernization and Reform".

Thank You for the:
Opportunity to speak to you
Consideration of my recommendations